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ABSTRACT

Noting that a substantial research literature on fathers has been built over the last 20 years and that fathers can no longer be considered "the forgotten parent" of the scientific community, this paper summarizes key research on fathers while highlighting concerns regarding the current emphasis on fatherhood expressed by parents and professionals who work with young families. Following an introductory section, Section 2 of the paper presents statistics on fathers in Canada and discusses the complexities involved when distinguishing the biological connection and the social reality of fatherhood. Section 3 examines how fathers' role has changed over the past two decades and compares the role to that of contemporary mothers, presenting criticisms that comparing mothers and fathers has led to negative images of fathers. Section 4 asserts that studies focusing on different groups of fathers demonstrate the variety of paternal involvement and identifies personal traits, familial traits, the work environment, and the characteristics of the family service environment as related to father involvement. This section maintains that professionals working with families need to think about the type of fatherly involvement they want to encourage. Section 5 considers the ways in which father involvement affects the lives of various family members, including the father, the child, the wife, and the sibling relationship. Section 6 focuses on fathers for which there is little research information: teenage fathers, immigrant fathers, and gay fathers. The concluding section includes a list of various father support projects and initiatives in Canada. (Contains 106 references.) (KB)

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Contemporary Family Trends

ED 470 317

Portraits of Fathers

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(2002)

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About the author...

Doctor Dubeau has been a professor at the Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO) since 1991. She teaches undergraduate and graduate level students in both the psycho education and psychology departments. She discovered an interest in child and family early on in her training while doing a B.A. in psychology at the Université de Sherbrooke. She did her master's degree at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, specializing in child intervention and, more specifically, in non-directive play therapy. Her concern for integrating the family within child intervention raised important questions about the role of fathers in the development of children. In order to answer these questions, she decided to incorporate this set of themes in her doctoral studies in developmental psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal. In the spring of 1995, she presented her thesis on the interactive and relational characteristics of fathers and mothers of pre-school aged children.

Fathers remain a primary area of interest for Doctor Dubeau. Several research projects have been carried out in the Outaouais region in order to better describe maternal and paternal roles (projects financed by FCAR and SSHRC). She is currently conducting an impact evaluation of the ProsPères initiative, which aims to support paternal involvement in two Montreal area communities (project financed by the CQRS). Dr. Dubeau is also taking part in an evaluation of the "Soutien à l'implication paternelle chez des pères en situation de pauvreté lors de la période postnatale 0-12 mois" project implemented by the Centre de Santé des Sept Rivières à Sept-Îles - CLSC. This project lends support to support poverty-stricken fathers during the post-natal period (0-12 months). She is also an external evaluator for the "Grandir sainement avec un père détenu" a project initiated by the Maison Radisson de Trois-Rivières, which aims to help incarcerated fathers maintain relationships with their children. In the spring of 2001, she was invited by FIION (Father Involvement Initiative Ontario Network) and Health Canada to carry out a review of Canadian studies on the topic of fatherhood. Her interest in fathers is shown by her participation as a researcher on both the GRAVE/ARDEC (Groupe de recherche et d'action sur la victimisation des enfants) and QEMVIE (Qualité éducative des milieux de vie de l'enfant) research teams.

As a researcher interested in fatherhood for the past eleven years, Dr. Dubeau remains highly stimulated by this field. Her interest is fed by her professional experiences of child and family intervention, her research tasks, as well as her personal life. Dr. Dubeau is the mother of two young children (Alexandre, 11 years and Mickaël, 5 years) and copes with the challenges of a dual earner family with careers in different cities. This situation requires her to be absent (physically!) from the family home for two to three days per week during which time, dad takes charge. Paternal involvement is therefore at the very heart of her daily life.

The Vanier Institute of the Family was established in 1965 under the patronage of Their Excellencies Governor General Georges P. Vanier and Madame Pauline Vanier. It is a national voluntary organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of Canada's families through research, publications, public education and advocacy. The Institute regularly works with businesses, legislators, policy-makers and program specialists, researchers, educators, family service professionals, the media and members of the general public.

Contemporary Family Trends is a series of occasional papers authored by leading Canadian experts in the field of family studies.

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A Word for our Readers: Our approach to fathers is influenced by many factors. It changes depending on the historical period studied and on the cultural and social environment in which fathers play their parental role. I too am subject to such biases since over the last fifteen years I've conducted studies so as to better understand Quebecois fathers and to evaluate support programs geared to their needs. The analysis I'm proposing and the examples described in this paper will thus be inevitably influenced by my interpretation of a certain Quebecois reality.

INTRODUCTION

Fathers, you're in the limelight! People are at long last talking about you. Some even go so far as to say that these days, fathers are being discussed too much! Be it in films, television series, documentaries or advertisements, one can only note the many and varied positive images of fathers that are presented. For example, one can think of the most recent Bell Canada ad broadcast in Quebec (and hopefully over the entire Canadian television network). In this ad, a father is rocking his young child and telling him a bedtime story. The story, told in a lively manner, turns out to be detailed information about his latest telephone bill. An advertising idea that reflects everyday life as parents live it, the joy shared by a child and its father, a father's typical preoccupation with economic aspects, as well as a way of depicting a new sharing of family tasks between the father and mother. This new sharing of responsibilities reflects fathers' greater involvement in caring for their children which we've observed over the last twenty years.

1.1. Is it true that fathers are being discussed too much?

I don't think so. Research on fathers is a fascinating field of study which currently tends to raise far more questions than answers. Contrary to what most people think, there are now numerous books and studies dealing with fathers. The father can no longer be considered as "the forgotten parent" of the scientific community, as Lamb put it in 1975. And it's precisely because of these numerous studies, that we are now in a position to come up with a critical analysis of the literature on fathers, and assess what's known or less known about the topic. We can also identify the various practical, conceptual, theoretical or methodological aspects that must be kept

in mind when interpreting or summarizing key research on fathers. This is what we shall attempt to do in this paper. Thus, fatherhood may seem to be a rather straightforward topic, but it is, in fact, highly complex in itself, which warrants discussing fatherhood even further!

We need to discuss fatherhood since for most people, this is a highly emotional topic and it plays a major role in our way of being a mother/father, husband/wife and man/woman. In discussing the qualities of a good father, this inevitably reflects our way of defining what's involved in being a good mother. As well, the various social roles we adopt aren't separate and distinct from one another; they're closely interrelated. Therefore, how I see myself as a man or woman (gender roles: femininity and masculinity) affects how I perceive myself as a mother or father. The close interconnectedness of social roles, differences or inequities that exist between men and women can easily upset certain individuals or lead to incorrectly interpreting messages conveyed, be it by the media, the scientific community or support groups offering services to young families. Talking about fathers is a way of exploring various points of view on the many aspects involved in being a father. This open-minded stance also contributes to properly interpreting certain messages conveyed about fathers (or mothers). And there are many, many such messages! In my work as a researcher, I've met a number of parents (mothers and fathers) from different socio-economic backgrounds, as well as professionals who work with young families. Their particular concerns about the current craze for fatherhood issues speak volumes. The following box describes some of these concerns.

Have you ever heard people say:

"Given the current economic situation, wanting to offer more services to fathers means we'll have to cut services we offer to mothers." (A CLSC professional)

"It's true that fathers play an important role and now, whenever I phone [a student's] home to discuss a problem, I'm careful not to ask to speak to the mother. But often it's the father himself who says: 'Just a minute, I'll put my wife on the phone." (A school psychologist)

"I did everything around the house. Now that we're divorced, I'm told he does the wash, the cooking and, when he has the children, he reads them their bedtime story, gives them their bath, etc. Why didn't he do that when we were together? It isn't because I didn't ask him to, believe me." (A divorced mother)

"I'd like to do my share of the work, really. But according to her, it was never done right. It wasn't just a case of doing things - they had to be done as she liked. In the end, I gave up." (The father of a four- year-old boy)

"People keep saying that nowadays fathers are more involved than the fathers of the generation before. OK, but can we maybe agree that mothers often still do most of the work when it comes to the child's daily care and education?" (A female university researcher)

So discussing fathers and their role is absolutely essential!

2. WHO ARE FATHERS EXACTLY?

2.1. A Few Canadian Statistics

To better understand fathers and their role, the best approach is to look at a few figures! The issue may seem simple, but extracting percentages from national surveys so as to get a good grasp of the Canadian father's profile is no easy matter. One usually has to combine different

statistics obtained. For 1996, based on data presented in "Profiling Canada's Families II"[3] published by the Vanier Institute of the Family, one can estimate that there are 4,162,855 Canadian fathers. This figure is obtained by adding the number of two-parent families (3,970,580) and that of single-parent families where the father is a lone parent (192,275).

The reader may also want to know the number of children living with their father. In 1996, there were 9,700,000 Canadian children under 25 years of age living with their family. Of this number, 74.3% live in families including a married couple (7,207,100 children); 8.4% live in families including a couple in a common-law relationship (814,800 children); and 2.7% live in single-parent families where the parent is of male gender (261,900 children). By adding these figures, one obtains a total of 8,283,000 children living with a father. One can thus say that in Canada, four million fathers take care of eight million children. Which, in itself, is quite impressive!

For statistical purposes, one often crosschecks data on family structure and on the socio-economic living conditions of these families. Thus, in 1997 it was found that over 1.4 million Canadian children were living in poverty[4] (nearly 1 out of 5 children). When one takes family structure into account, one observes that poverty rates are much higher for single-parent families with children under 18 years of age than for two-parent families, and more specifically when single mothers are involved (56%) compared to single fathers (24%)[5].

With this data, we can come up with an initial portrait of fatherhood. Yet it will be noted that certain aspects are much less documented than others. For example, this is the case when we try to understand various sub-groups of fathers, including fathers who are very likely among the 945,235 families counted where the mother is raising children on her own (fathers in prison, gay fathers, teenage fathers, etc.). One must note that most of the data from censuses have been

[3] Data taken largely from the Census of Canada conducted by Statistics Canada in 1996.

[4] The authors used Statistic Canada's method to evaluate poverty in Canada, namely low-income cutoffs (LICOs) which are generated on a yearly basis. According to this method, families with an income below the LICOs are much poorer than average.

[5] These percentages are similar to those obtained in the United States (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000).

collated by information provided by mothers. Mothers for these sub-groups of fathers may thus prefer not identifying them as the children's father. There is little information currently available on cases of couples living in a common-law relationship where fatherhood isn't established (legal recognition of fatherhood). This information seems even more relevant since there's an observed increase over the last few years of this type of family (common-law marriage). Between 1971 and 1996, there was also an increase in the number of single-parent families where the mother is raising children on her own and has never been married (an increase of 6% to 24%).

In conclusion, we'd like to point out that these statistics represent a static picture of fatherhood that reflects a situation at a given time. It might be relevant to take a more dynamic approach to an individual's personal journey and to men and women's parental paths (Desrosiers, Juby, & Le Bourdais, 1997). We shall deal with this aspect later in this paper.

2.2. Beyond Statistics!

The above statistics reflect the importance of properly describing the individual concerned. Who do we consider to be a child's father? It seems that over time, everything becomes more complex! The comments of an elementary school teacher illustrate the growing complexity surrounding the phenomenon of fatherhood.

"We were working on an awareness activity dealing with father involvement and we asked the children to draw what they liked doing with their father. What surprised me were their reactions. I first had to answer the children's questions: 'Yes, but what father exactly? My real father or my new father?' 'I don't have a father (or I've never seen him!).' Then, there were the parents' comments: 'I saw my son's drawing, but it isn't true to life. He's never played hockey with his father; he never sees him.' I finally realized that things weren't as simple as one might think."

(A teacher interviewed for evaluation of the ProsPère program, a community initiative aimed at promoting fatherly involvement.)

In order to profile today's fathers, the person involved must first be identified. Traditionally, fatherhood was defined in terms of a **biological bond** linking a child to a male adult. For the mother, the biological bond was obvious, whereas ensuring such a bond between the father and the unborn child generally stemmed from the stability of the couple, usually expressed and consolidated in the social institution of marriage, which linked the spousal role to the parental role. The focus formerly put on the biological bond when defining fatherhood is much more difficult to maintain for families in 2000. Firstly, male-female relationships are less stable, as recent divorce and separation statistics demonstrate. According to these statistics, nearly a third of marriages end in divorce (Statistics Canada, 1995). Including common-law relationships, this percentage jumps to nearly 50%. But marriage break-up doesn't eliminate parental responsibilities: "the child never divorces his parents". Given the current divorce and separation rates, the spousal aspect tends to be quite separate from the parental aspect. The personal journey as a parent can vary a great deal, depending on the individual. Generally speaking, most men embarked on their parenting career with a wife who had no children (eight men out of ten in Quebec), but nowadays, things tend to be different for younger men where it isn't unusual to begin as a stepfather (Desrosiers, Juby, & LeBourdais, 1997). It's therefore becoming important to view fatherhood in a more dynamic way, what some authors qualify as the flux of fatherhood. In the course of his lifetime, a man might be the father of children who no longer live with him,

while being stepfather to his new wife's children, then, with her, he might once again become a new father.

Fathers can therefore, successively or simultaneously, have various statuses as fathers, but it should also be pointed out that medical advances have had a great impact on the biological basis of fatherhood. Now that effective birth control methods and oral contraceptives are available, parental roles are now more balanced and egalitarian. Men can now confirm their biological fatherhood (with a DNA test) or their reproductive potential (with a fertility test). Medical techniques are now available to couples with infertility problems (artificial insemination). Adoption is also a possible legal route when faced with an infertility problem. Yet the impact of recent medical and legal developments raises issues related to fatherhood. The true story of young Spencer, "Un père de trop" (A Father Too Many), is a perfect example of the debate. Who should take care of Spencer? His adoptive parents who adore him or his biological father who has lost all hope of ever getting custody of his son? (Hollandsworth, 2001). This story relates three years of a bitter legal battle to decide who should get custody of the child, the biological father declaring that his former spouse had never asked his permission to give his son up for adoption. The court proceedings were long and heartrending for both parties involved. For the child's welfare, the father finally decides to negotiate an arrangement with the adoptive parents giving him the legal right to a monthly visit and an official recognition of him as the boy's biological father by adding his surname to the child's name. Yet finding answers to legal issues doesn't put an end to human issues arising out of this debate. When questioned a year after the end of the trial, the father declares: "I only hope that one day, my son will know that I didn't abandon him, that I fought with all my might to keep him. He may be very happy, but I hope he'll understand that I too would have been a good father."

It's now becoming more and more obvious that the mere biological bond doesn't reflect all that's involved in being a father. Being a father means more than being the biological father! Fatherhood is no longer necessarily based on a biological bond, but rather on **social realities** (Saucier, 2001). Fatherly involvement is seen as a social construct that changes with the times, as well as with the culture, the characteristics and the mores of a given society. Adopting a social perspective defines fatherhood more in terms of the parental roles of mothers and fathers.

These diverse roles are described in terms of the child's needs (physical, emotional, cognitive and social needs) since one is a mother or a father when a child is present. Taking a social approach to fatherhood inevitably raises questions about the similarities (how roles can be interchanged) or differences between maternal and paternal roles. One could believe that the last twenty years of social changes have lead to a more egalitarian model of shared roles between both parents. It seems however that parental roles have changed more in the discourse than in day-to-day reality. There are more women in the job market (25% in 1950 compared to 60% in 1990), yet studies comparing mothers' and fathers' involvement demonstrate that women still take on the primary responsibilities when it comes to caregiving and to the child's education (Pleck, 1997). The same applies to domestic chores. As well, fewer women (55%) than men (89%) tend to believe that family tasks are shared equitably and fairly (Wilkie et al. 1998).

3. WHAT IS THE FATHER'S ROLE?

In order to better identify what fathers actually do, one often needs to have a point of reference. In this section, the traits exhibited by today's fathers will be compared with those of former generations and with those of mothers.

3.1. Today's Father Compared to Yesterday's

Most people agree that today's fathers are more involved in raising their children than was the case for their own fathers (Pleck, 1997; Snarey, 1993, 1997). For many years, men were the providers and as such, had to spend most of their time outside the family home in order to provide the family with a certain economic security. Thus, a family home was provided, the child's physical needs were met and a certain material wealth was provided, making it possible to truly stimulate the child and favour his development. Now the pendulum has swung in the other direction, and men are no longer mere providers but are now affectionate and caring fathers, directly and emotionally involved in raising, caring for and interacting with their children. The greater number of women in the job market[6], the higher divorce rate and a less traditional division of roles and responsibilities for mothers and fathers are all factors that explain why fathers now play a more active role. As well, one mustn't overlook the fact that

[6] Since the 1990s, over 60% of mothers are in the job market, no matter what age their children may have.

men want to be closer to their children. Recent publications give a more complex definition of fatherly involvement by emphasizing different types of involvement depending on the situation, the social group and personal experience (Lamb, 1986; Palkovitz, 1997). For Bouchard (2001), "putting bread on the table is recognized as being a form of involvement for fathers who, because of job constraints, are unable to be more involved in raising their children. Yet others are more involved because of their availability, their education or earlier experiences. For divorced fathers, parental involvement may be limited to seeing their children from time to time and maintaining an emotional relationship with them." In short, there are many ways of playing one's role as a father and of being important in the child's eyes. The following testimony demonstrates how relative the quantitative aspect of the father's involvement is in terms of its impact on the child.

> "My father was always there for us. I remember, on Sunday mornings, my brothers and I would go to his bedroom and have wild fights in bed and we'd all always end up laughing uncontrollably. Meanwhile, Mom would be preparing our favourite breakfasts. It was a special day in the week. Today, I realize that we really didn't see much of Dad other than on Sundays. He worked six days a week and often got home late. So why do I remember him as always being there for us? When you get right down to it, it isn't always the amount of time you spend together that matters, but the quality of time you spend together. And I also realize that my mother would often talk about him, so he was always there, in a sense."
> (A female professional, age 40 , *Formation sur l'engagement paternel : Place allouée par les femmes*)

3.2. Fathers Compared to Mothers

In the 1980s, fathers' increased involvement in raising their children was of interest to parenting researchers who wanted to become better acquainted with this forgotten parent of the scientific community. Their research was often based on a comparison of maternal traits with those of

fathers. What are the main findings of these studies? Are there similarities and differences between mothers and fathers?

Right from the start, one falls back on the popular notion of maternal instinct. And of course, it must be recognized that fathers get off to a bit of a late start, biologically speaking. Pregnancy, childbirth, breast-feeding... all tend to create a strong bond between a mother and her child. Fathers experience these bonding moments, but differently. In studies conducted in controlled situations (where the researcher specifies the items to be observed, e.g. feeding the baby, interacting with the baby, etc.), similar competencies have been clearly observed for both parents, for caregiving (Parke & Sawin, 1980), for play (Ross & Taylor, 1989) and for language (Phillips & Parke, 1979). These studies thus allow us to recognize that fathers are just as sensitive as mothers to different signals emitted by the child. Yet when observing parental behaviours on an everyday basis, that is in uncontrolled situations, researchers have noted that similar competencies don't translate into an equitable sharing of familial and educational tasks since mothers still take on the primary role in raising children (Côté & Chamberland, 1991; Demo & Acock, 1993). It should be pointed out that these studies deal with parental involvement quantitatively (the frequency of the parent's interaction with the child).[7]

Along with quantitative differences of involvement, there are also distinctions observed qualitatively in the manner in which the parent performs certain tasks and interacts with the child. Generally speaking, the review of studies comparing mothers and fathers demonstrates greater similarities than differences between parental behaviours (Pedersen, 1980). Yet most researchers agree on the main differences observed. The first is **the type of activity** in which the parent is engaged. In proportion to the time spent interacting with their young children, mothers interact more in a caregiving situation, whereas fathers interact in a play situation, especially physical play (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Dickie, 1987; Lamb, 1996). Secondly, in the area of **verbal exchanges**, mothers and fathers exhibit different behaviours (McLaughlin, 1983;

[7] The reader must be prudent here for the concept of parental involvement can be measured in various ways. Certain authors will use a quantitative measure of involvement: the number of hours spent directly interacting with the child (e. g. McBride & Mills, 1993). The measure can also be of a more qualitative nature by describing the type

Pedersen, Anderson and Cain, 1980; Rogé, 1997). According to these studies, mothers are more repetitive, they more frequently use the interrogative form ("Now, what could we do with that?") and their exchanges are oriented towards explaining things. Fathers verbalize less, are more involved in doing things and when making verbal statements, they more frequently use the imperative form ("You take the tracks and I'll assemble the train station.") In the area of language, fathers are perceived as being more demanding partners than is the case for mothers (Labrell, 1997), which can be explained by the fact that fathers are less familiar with the child's language, since mothers interact more with the child. Other authors insist on the fact that by being more demanding, fathers promote the child's integration in settings outside the home (e.g. day care) where it will be important that the child be able to make himself understood (Le Chanu & Marcos, 1994). Thirdly, fathers are less tolerant of **children's dependent behaviours**, especially when the child is a boy (Dubeau & Moss, 1998; Dubeau, Coutu, & Moss, 2000; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Russell & Russell, 1987). Lastly, compared to mothers, fathers tend to exhibit more **unconventional behaviours** which tend to surprise and throw the child off balance (e.g. teasing, making fun of him, putting a block on his head, etc.), helping the child develop self-control (Labrell, 1996, 1997).

"When my husband would take Jérôme and playfully toss him in the air, I preferred not to watch. I'd hear the baby roar with laughter and ask his father for more and I hoped it wouldn't all end in tears."
(A mother during an interview)

"I try to calm him down at bedtime, so I give him a bath and read him a little story. But my husband plays with him, they wrestle and wrangle, which gets him all excited when I try to put him in bed."
(A mother during an interview)

of activities in which the parent is engaged (Radin, 1994). See Pleck's review (1997) dealing with the ambiguity arising from different measures of parental involvement.

Similarities and differences observed between maternal and paternal behaviours are interesting since they allow researchers to begin developing and conceptualizing different parental research models which will need to be validated in future research (Dubeau, Coutu, & Moss, 2000; Le Camus, 1995). Yet it seems to me that the main thing to remember is that there isn't necessarily one type of interaction that's better than the other. Both parents contribute to the child's development by providing different types of learning experiences.

A number of researchers have been critical of studies conducted to compare maternal and paternal traits. Inevitably, when one makes comparisons, there's always one who performs better than the other! Therefore, it wasn't at all surprising that for these studies, the findings generally demonstrate the preponderance of maternal measurement tools for involvement, as well as for different traits related to the child's development and adjustment. Several hypotheses about methodology have been suggested by some authors to explain the few significant findings observed for fathers compared to mothers. For example, Youngblade et al. expressed their criticism (1993) of measurement tools which are mainly developed and validated for mothers, and which might not adequately reflect what fatherhood and father involvement really entail. The observation method, mainly used in studies on the first stages of a child's development, has also been criticized. Fathers tend to act and feel differently when they know they're being observed or filmed, which seems to be less the case for mothers (DeSalvo & Zurcher, 1984). Lastly, Yogman's studies (1981, 1982) illustrate the differential findings obtained depending on the decoding strategy chosen when interpreting observed behaviours (behaviour frequency – quantitative, particular setting and circumstances – qualitative). According to this author, "taking the child" is just as frequent for both parents, but this type of behaviour takes place in a play situation for fathers, and in a caregiving situation for mothers. These methodology problems must therefore be kept in mind when analyzing and interpreting findings obtained for fathers.

For some researchers, comparing maternal and paternal traits has led to negative images of fathers: the absent father, the incompetent father, the violent father, the uninvolved father, and so on (Dienhart, 1998; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Pratt, Danso, Arnold, Norris, & Filyer, 2001). Although we recognize that these unenviable models of fathers do exist, they do not represent all

fathers as a group. It's high time that researchers studying fatherhood take a more "generative" and focussed approach on fathers' strengths and motivations (Haas & Hwang, 1995) in their paternal role in a different cultural and historical context from that of mothers (Pruett, 1995). According to these authors, for many years, studies were conducted exclusively on mothers, which resulted in parental qualities being linked to feminine traits such as sensitivity, communication, demonstration of emotion, etc. But if we were to focus more on fathers' strengths, we could identify fatherly traits that have a positive impact on child development. Palm and Palkovitz (1988) mention such traits as autonomy, a realistic approach and playfulness.

"A father isn't a second mother. A father isn't maternal, he's paternal."
(A male professional in a fathers' group)

"I may do the same things as my wife with Mickaël, but I do them differently. At any rate, I would be incapable of doing what she does. She's perfect and I'm not!"
(The father of two boys)

4. HIS WAY OF BEING A "FATHER"

By using a variety of methods in their studies, researchers will be able to better understand fathers. In this regard, the findings presented in the preceding section were derived from studies comparing mothers and fathers or fathers of different generations. There's also another type of comparative study found in the literature on fatherhood which focuses on comparing different groups of fathers. These studies demonstrate that there are many kinds of paternal involvement depending on different personal traits exhibited by the father, the mother or the child. These studies have especially contributed to identifying significant factors related to a father's involvement: Why is it that fathers of some families are more involved than others?

Numerous studies have made it possible to better identify significant factors that have an impact on fatherly involvement (See reviews drawn up by Pleck, 1997; Turcotte, Dubeau, Bolté, & Paquette, 2001; Woodworth, Belsky, & Crnic, 1996). It's generally agreed that a father's involvement depends on the interaction of a number of factors related to the father, the wife and the child's personal traits, as well as those related to familial, social and cultural contexts.

To be more specific, findings concerning **personal traits** indicate that men tend to be more involved in raising their children if they value the paternal role (Levant, Slattery, & Loiselle, 1987), if it's a major part of their self-identity (LaRossa, 1997; Palkovitz, 1984) and if they feel competent as parents (Russell, 1982). Yet a possible obstacle to being involved as fathers depends on how they were socialized as boys. Activities such as "taking care of" and "being affectionate" are even today considered to be more feminine traits and are rather incompatible with "popular" models of manliness and masculinity.

In terms of **familial traits**, men tend to be more involved in raising their children when they have a harmonious, stable and satisfying marital relationship (Snarey, 1993) and when they feel encouraged by their wife to participate more in caring for and in raising their children (Cowan & Cowan, 1987; Simons, Whitbec, Conger, & Melby, 1990). A father's involvement seems to largely depend on how much the mother lets the father participate. Therefore, essentially, it isn't just that fathers want to be close to their children; their wife also has to let them develop this special relationship with them. A number of researchers have studied this phenomenon qualified as mothers' "gatekeeping"[8] (De Luccie, 1995; Pleck, 1983).

A man's **work environment** is also an important factor in his involvement as a father (Dulac, 1998; Hass, 1990; Marsiglio, 1991). Thanks to several provisions that are now included in collective labour agreements, men can now better balance work and family demands. Yet men seldom have recourse to these provisions. For example, only 4.2% of men took advantage of the

[8] It pertains to the role of "guardian" taken on by mothers in an area where their expertise has been traditionally recognized. As guardian, the mother wouldn't accept sharing responsibilities linked to caregiving and education with the father unless she recognizes that it would significantly contribute to the child's development.

paid parental leave instituted in Quebec in 1990 (Moisan, 1995, 1997). The percentage droped to 2.5% for men taking the entire 10-week period allotted at that time to parental leave. A number of obstacles linked to work are identified, such as: major income loss; fear as to their career path and possible promotions; guilt towards their colleagues who'll have to take on tasks, etc.

Lastly, the characteristics of **service environments** offered to young families seem to be significant factors in fathers' involvement (Levine, 1993; Palm & Palkovitz, 1988). In this regard, we could mention the hours services are available which make it difficult for working fathers to attend vaccination clinics for their children. The type of activities offered may also be less appealing to male clients. Several programs take the form of discussion groups or education groups similar to those offered to mothers (e.g. prenatal sessions, parenting programs, etc.)[9]. By taking advantage of these educational programs, some fathers can feel more competent as parents. Yet the low participation and continued attendance rates of fathers in these programs suggest that this type of support activity may not meet most fathers' needs (Dubeau, Turcotte & Coutu, 1999). Finally, fathers may feel less comfortable in a service environment made up mainly of a female staff.

This brief review of significant factors in a father's involvement demonstrates the many and varied factors that enter into play and that affect paternal behaviours. It therefore suggests to service staff and decision makers interesting avenues that would promote paternal involvement. This review highlights the quantitative aspect of paternal involvement where the rule "more is better" seems to prevail. But is this really a goal to achieve and for whom? A second question that more specifically concerns support services for families would be: What type of fatherly involvement do we want to encourage?

[9] See Arama (1997) for a review of support resources and projects related to fatherhood in Quebec.

5. FATHERS AFFECT THE WHOLE FAMILY

The observed increase in fatherly involvement and the many forms this involvement can take are only significant when they're associated with positive consequences. More specifically, how does a father's involvement directly or indirectly change the lives of various family members? Can it make a difference?

On examining studies conducted in this area, one must be prudent when analyzing consequences that may be attributable to the father's direct interactions with his child (direct influence) or that may be linked to paternal traits having an effect on the quality of the mother-child interactions (indirect influence). For example, the spousal or economic support offered by a father who might interact only minimally with his child may have a positive effect, since it helps the mother be less preoccupied and under stress, and thus more available to her child.

5.1. Consequences for the Father

Fathers may feel that being a father has its price in the short term, but they generally see their parental involvement in a positive light. This price to pay is linked to their career (feeling there isn't enough time, stress). These effects are observed especially in families where both parents work. (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Jump & Haas, 1987).

5.2. Consequences for the Child

According to several studies, a father's involvement has positive effects on many facets of the child's development, as well as on his social adjustment and his adjustment to the school milieu. The child is less likely to adopt stereotyped attitudes about gender roles (Lamb, Pleck, & Levine, 1985; also see Baruch & Barnett, 1986). These children are more likely to demonstrate higher cognitive or intellectual skills than children whose father is less involved (Nugent, 1991; Radin, 1994). These competencies are exhibited in a better adjustment to the school milieu (Harris,

Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998)[10]. When a father is involved, the child seems to exhibit better social skills and is better adjusted psychologically (see reviews by Biller and Solomon, 1986; Phares, 1999). Fatherly involvement could also offset abuse, either directly by establishing an early emotional bond, or indirectly through support offered to mothers who in turn present less risk of being victims of abuse (Egeland, Jacobitz and Sroufe, 1988; Quinton, Rutter and Liddle, 1984). These findings reveal how important a father's positive involvement is for the child. Yet one mustn't attribute all the child's successes to the father alone. But overall, taking into account paternal measurements, over and above maternal ones, helps better explain the child's behaviours.

Likewise, and strange as it may seem, one can determine the effect of the father's involvement by examining families where fathers are absent. The father may be absent for different reasons: death, marriage break-up or distance because of the father's job (e.g. military personnel, sailors, etc.). Generally speaking, the effects are less dramatic when the absence is due to death (Santrock, 1972) or due to the father's job demands (Hiew, 1992). But in the case of broken homes, there are more negative effects on the child's adjustment to the school milieu, but this varies depending on different factors such as the child's age at the time the parents separated, the child's gender, the incidence of open conflicts between the spouses, the former spouses' economic situation and the custody terms (Hetherington, 1993). But first, let us point out the often exaggerated perception of the adverse effects of separation on the child's adjustment. According to Cyr (1998), most children (70%-80%) do not exhibit severe and long-term problems following their parents' separation or divorce. Yet one must recognize that from 20-30% of children do not fare as well. To be more specific, divorce or separation involves higher risks when the child is an infant since young children are more dependent on their parents and less protected by extra-familial support provided by teachers and friends. Young children's developmental competencies are limited and thus they have fewer skills to deal with such an ordeal. Older children have developed cognitive skills which help them attribute responsibility

[10] These findings support the recommendation made by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation du Québec to further promote fathers' involvement in the child's school activities. This recommendation was made following publication of alarming statistics on drop out rates of students, especially in the case of boys (twice as many boys as girls do not complete high school).

for conflicts in a more realistic way (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989). In comparison with girls, boys are more strongly affected by their parents' separation. They exhibit more behavioural problems in day care and in school (Guidubaldi and Perry, 1984, 1985) and they have more learning disorders. Adolescents from broken homes exhibit more aggressive behaviour and consume more drugs (Peck, 1989). But one mustn't conclude that girls/teenage girls aren't affected by their parents' separation or divorce. According to Hetherington (1993), teenage girls whose father is absent experience more problems in their heterosexual relationships. They seek more attention from male adults, more contact with male peers and spend more time on activities considered to be more typical of males. The degree of former conflicts between the parents is a key variable to consider, especially if the child has witnessed such conflicts. Some researchers think that it wouldn't be the divorce per se that would be responsible for the child's adjustment problems, but rather the deteriorating marital climate which makes parents less available to adequately meet the child's needs (Shaw, Emery and Tuer, 1993). This variable is also important since the degree of conflict in the marital relationship is associated with maintaining contact with the child following the separation (Kurdek, 1986). Therefore, frequent and regular contact with the father promotes the child's adjustment, except in situations where the father is extremely immature or maladjusted (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

In short, one must be prudent when interpreting research on divorce or separation since, according to Lamb (1995), if a child has poor social skills or problems at school, it's not due to the lack of a male model. Rather it seems to result from the lack of one or more aspects of the fatherly role (economic, social or emotional aspects) in the child's life. In cases of equivalent incomes and a similar quality of parent-child relationship, children raised by a single parent develop just as well as those raised in two-parent families (Dawson, 1991; Entwhisle & Alexander, 1996). Such generalizations apply for single-parent families where the father or the mother is head of the household. One must above all verify if the children's custody is a conscious choice on the part of the parent and if the parent gets external support. According to Stassen-Berger (2002), "a father who was actively involved in raising his children before the separation and who wants to have custody might have a better chance of becoming a good parent than is the case for many women who obtained custody because it was expected of them or because their former spouse wasn't interested, especially since external support of fathers who

are raising children on their own is often more present than is the case for single mothers in similar situations."

5.3. Consequences for the Wife

A father not only directly influences his children; his involvement in fathering also affects the mother's behaviour, just as the mother's attitude has an effect on that of the father and on the degree to which he'll be interested in being there for his family (Belsky, 1981; Lewis, Feiring and Weinraub, 1981)[11]. The family has undergone a number of changes over the last few years: there are more mothers in the job market, and they get less support from their own family. Therefore they really depend on their spouse's support (Father Involvement Initiative - Ontario Network, 2001). Therefore, in practice, one cannot simply want a common ground, one must be willing to share it and this isn't achieved without much effort. For some parents, co-parenting (i.e. sharing parental tasks with another adult) means that parents take an equal responsibility in terms of presence, availability and caregiving. For others, this means performing a task exactly as the other would do it. But what's really involved is being a team and thus being more capable of meeting all the child's needs. Some couples succeed (Dienhart & Daly, 1997), but achieving this balance isn't an easy matter, far from it! In their study conducted on working mothers who were also raising children, Descarries et al. (1995) note that 45% of such mothers said they were undecided about or in disagreement with the fact that their husbands take on more responsibilities for the children.

5.4. Consequences for Siblings

There is a lot of research demonstrating the positive effects of a father's involvement on the child's relationships with his peers, but very little on relationships between brothers and sisters. But Volling's findings (1992) seem worthy of mention. According to this author, paternal behaviours in regard to the quality of the care given and the expression of affection can help predict pro-social and co-operative behaviours between siblings. This author also emphasizes that the more fathers exhibit affectionate behaviours that are unique to each child, the less positive is the relationship among siblings. This was not observed for maternal measurements. This seems to indicate that children expect certain variations in the mother's behaviour, whereas

such behaviour in the father is seen in a negative light. This surprising observation is difficult to interpret and requires confirmation in future research. However, it may be that the distinct nature and contexts that are part of mother-child and father-child interactions may in part explain the child's different expectations for each of her parents. Mothers interact more frequently with the child on a daily basis and especially in a caregiving situation (according to the needs of the child, depending on his age), so children would be exposed to a wider range of maternal behaviours. Father-child interactions are less frequent on a daily basis and take place more in a play situation, especially physical play. In this special kind of context, the different behaviours exhibited by the father toward each of the children could lead to jealousy, thus making the relationships between siblings less harmonious.

6. FATHERS WE KNOW LITTLE ABOUT!

As I'm in the process of writing this paper, I realize how difficult it is to render all the ramifications involved or to be as precise as one should be in such a text. Yet it seems essential to write a few lines to clearly state that one cannot speak of fathers as a homogeneous whole. It's true that the main findings of the studies presented in this paper were obtained for fathers in two-parent families who are white and who belong to an average (or above-average) socio-economic bracket. However, there are many more kinds of fathers experiencing far different ways of being fathers. We're beginning to be better acquainted with fatherhood as it is lived by divorced/separated fathers (having custody of the child or not) and stepfathers (Hetherington & Henderson, 1997). But one must admit that we have little information on less traditional fathers, such as teenage fathers, immigrant fathers, gay fathers or fathers in prison. Such fathers have particular traits and thus have specific needs that should be further documented. What do we know about these fathers?

6.1. Teenage Fathers

Becoming a father during one's adolescence isn't a normal part of growing up. It's often an unplanned and undesirable event that creates a very particular kind of parenting situation. The

[11] Most studies are based on correlations, which make it impossible to establish the flow of influences exerted.

principal problems include the mother not recognizing his legal status as the child's father, high tension between the couple, more conflicts with the teenage father's in-laws and an insecure economic situation (Marsiglio & Cohan, 1997). In a study conducted on teenage mothers, Rains, Davis and McKinnon (1998) compare service professionals' and mothers' perceptions in regard to recognizing the teenage father's legal status as the child's father and in regard to his primarily economic responsibilities. The findings demonstrate that mothers view these aspects differently, and express a certain resistance to getting the teenage fathers involved, since they argue that they want to be more independent. These findings are important for those developing support services for this clientele.

6.2. Immigrant Fathers

In recent years, we've observed a higher immigration rate in Canada. Given this situation, we need more research on the impact of various cultural models on fatherhood for immigrant fathers. According to Steinberg et al. (2000), Canadian fathers are more involved during the prenatal, perinatal and postnatal periods than are Japanese fathers (living in Canada and in Japan). Dyke and Saucier (2000) compared fathers of Haitian, Vietnamese and Quebecois descent. According to these authors, one must distinguish between immigrant fathers' problems arising from their adjustment to being a parent and problems arising from their adjustment to the new socio-cultural situation (also called "acculturation").

6.3. Gay Fathers

Because of our cultural heritage where the notions of heterosexuality and parenting are so closely linked and well established, it's quite difficult to imagine gay men as fathers (Patterson, 2000; Patterson & Chan, 1997; Miller, 1979). According to Leroy-Forgeot (1999), 50% of homosexuals live as couples; 10%[12] of these individuals have children and 40-50% express the desire to have children. The topic of fatherhood raises several issues for this group of fathers. Who are gay fathers and how do they become parents? What types of parents are they and what parental roles do they play? What are the consequences for the child's development? There is little data available on gay fathers, but it seems that the attitudes and behaviours of gay fathers

[12] One must be prudent about the identified percentage, taking into account the difficulty of obtaining precise statistics from individuals who often prefer not revealing their sexual orientation.

are very similar to those of divorced heterosexual fathers (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989). As well, children of homosexual parents don't seen to be at greater risk regarding their sexual identity or social adjustment (Susset & Boulanger, 1995).

IN CONCLUSION

A great deal of information has been presented dealing with various aspects of fatherhood, but if I were to state the main points to recall, they would be as follows:

A father is "important"
Being a father: "He did it his way"
Being a father, "step by step"

6.4. A Father is Important and It Makes All the Difference

Becoming a father is a significant stage in adult life. As for any adjustment period, it's a time when the individual is especially sensitive since he's looking back and taking stock of his past experiences. It's a turning point that raises questions about one's behaviours thus far. According to a qualitative study on fathers living in extreme poverty, fatherhood plays a very important role in their lives. For these men, being a "good father" is perhaps what will help them become part of society by leading honest lives as citizens and workers (Ouellet and Goulet, 1998). Support groups offering services to young families try to offer more assistance during these adjustment periods. Being a father is a unique and major experience for the father himself. The child also benefits, as is demonstrated by the research described above. A father's involvement creates new learning situations since interacting as a threesome is different than a one-on-one exchange and because very often, mothers and fathers with their different traits don't interact with the child in the same way. A child has many needs and, if it takes two to create life,

I feel that it also takes two to meet all those needs. In a situation where there's a more traditional division of roles and responsibilities, the economic and spousal support provided by the father are an asset for mothers, since they can enjoy more harmonious interactions with their children and can be more available to them. A father's involvement with his children can help develop a partnership between him and his wife, which will help both of them meet the children's developmental challenges.

6.5. Being a Father: "He did it His Way"

Up until now, studies on fathers have clearly demonstrated the many forms fatherly involvement can take. Some fathers are more involved than others (quantitative involvement), but they aren't necessarily involved in the same type of activities or in the same way (qualitative involvement). This is due to different personal, familial, social and cultural traits. Generally speaking, studies haven't been able to help us identify one type of fatherly involvement that's better or more effective than another (we're referring here to a positive involvement on the father's part).

6.6. Being a Father, "Step by Step"

Becoming a father is an adventure that unfolds from day to day. No one is a born parent and no one masters the art of parenting overnight. The learning process applies to parenthood as with any other type of learning. The earlier in the child's life one becomes involved, the easier the task. Interpreting a six-month-old baby's signals is generally simpler than understanding our teenager's reactions if we haven't spent much time with him. As well, it's a recognized fact that getting involved early on is the best predictor of one's later involvement with the child (Belsky & Volling, 1987). Fathers participating in prenatal courses and in childbirth are welcome changes which favour such an early involvement. As for any type of learning, one has to feel free to make mistakes and be proud of each small success, each moment that went wonderfully well. But one mustn't forget that the father, unlike the mother, is less often in dyadic interaction (i.e. alone with the child). And besides, it's always more difficult to develop one's competencies when one feels one's being observed!

6.7. In closing, a few wee gems to discover: Father support projects, initiatives and programs

Contrary to what most people may believe, there are more and more services, activities and associations whose goal is to better support fatherhood in its various facets.

Sur le terrain des pères. Projets de soutien et de valorisation du rôle paternel.

Bolté, C., Devault, A., St-Denis, M., & Gaudet, J. (in production)

A survey of Canadian projects whose goal is to value fathers' involvement with their children aged 0-12 years. Of the 61 projects analyzed, 15 are described in detail as models of good projects, according to criteria generally used when developing programs (team makeup, theoretical framework, activity level, duration, consistency, growth rate, chances of survival, originality, etc.).

Available on the Web site: www.unites.uqam.ca/grave (see "Nouveautés")

Getting men involved: Strategies for early childhood programs

Levine, J., Murphy, D., & Wilson, S. (1993)

An asset for any professional interested in developing a support program to promote fatherly involvement. The guide covers all the stages required to develop and implant a program. Simple, complete and very practical. Recruitment strategies: a real gem not to be overlooked.

ProsPère: A community support project in Quebec whose goal is to promote fatherly involvement.

A group of researchers and practitioners associated with GRAVE (Groupe de Recherche et d'Action sur la Victimisation des enfants)

GRAVE Web site: www.unites.uqam.ca/grave

(See: "Père en mouvement" OR "ProsPère")

Also see the two implementation evaluation reports

À Pointe-Claumet, on fait place aux pères (Turcotte, G., Desjardins, N., & Ouellet, F. (2001). Direction de la Santé Publique et Régie Régionale de la Santé et des Services Sociaux de Montréal-Centre.

À Rosemont, ça CooPère (Ouellet, F., Turcotte, G., & Desjardins, N. (2001) Direction de la Santé Publique et Régie Régionale de la Santé et des Services Sociaux de Montréal-Centre.

Father Involvement Initiative - Ontario Network (FIION)

Similar to the Quebecois Prospère project, this initiative has been implanted in seven Ontario communities.
Web site: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/phdd/case_studies/cs_ontario

National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF)

http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu

National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF). This Web site contains updated summaries of documentation or research reports on fatherhood, as well as recommendations regarding research on various topics related to fatherhood (e.g. role transitions, co-parenting, joblessness and unemployment, etc.). For each topic treated, recommendations are made regarding research, practices and policies.

Dads Canada

http://www.dadscan.org

The Dads Canada site is a gateway helping identify individuals (researchers, professionals), organizations and institutions interested in promoting fatherhood in Canada. This information is presented for the various provinces across Canada.

Hands-On Dad / Un père actif : Guide pour le nouveau père
Issue on fatherhood, *Today's Parent / Parents pour la vie*

Être père : la belle aventure! (Pour hommes d'abord ...)

Document published by the Secretariat for Family Affairs in Quebec for the International Year of the Family (1994)

Involved fathers : A guide for Today's Dad
Father Involvement Initiative - Ontario Network (FIION) (2001) Project
This short guide of about forty pages is also available in French under the title "*L'engagement paternel : le guide du père d'aujourd'hui*".

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